MEDITERRANEAN PASSAGES WITH MALDUSA



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This week we chatted with Jasmine, an anthropologist and activist involved in the migrant solidarity and freedom of movement cultural organization called Maldusa which is based in some of the southern most reaches of Italy in Palermo, Sicily, and the island of Lampedusa and in the Mediterranean Sea. We speak for the hour about migration across the sea, what drives and draws people to make the treacherous journey, state, para state and civil institutions on both sides of the sea engaging the issue of crossings and other topics.

You can find the guests at www.maldusa.org on instagram @maldusa.project on facebook www.facebook.com/MaldusaProject **JASMINE:** So I'm Jasmine, pronouns she/her, and I'm part of Maldusa Cultural Association in Italy, and a researcher in anthropology currently based, mainly, in Italy.

TFSR: And is the subject matter of your research and anthropology related to the work that Maldusa is engaged in?

J: Yeah, it is. My research is about civil search and rescue organizations in the Central Mediterranean Sea. And I actually carried out these research through deep participation on board of some ships. And I would say that actually, while I was doing my ethnography, I somehow became a rescuer myself. I was not really involved in this kind of topics and activities before, but then since 2019, it has become, definitely, the main part of my life. And Maldusa is an association that is absolutely focused on solidarity to freedom of movement, and to people on the move. So yeah, my research and my activities with Maldusa are absolutely related, I would say.

TFSR: Yeah. Can you talk about what material and cultural work it does and also this concept of "freedom of movement", and why that's important?

J: Yeah. So Maldusa is a cultural association based in Palermo in Sicily and Lampedusa, a very small Italian island that actually is much closer to Tunisia than to Italy, and that is sadly famous for being the "migrant's island" because it's actually one of the main point of arrivals in Italy from the North Africa.

With Maldusa we started actually not even one year ago so we are a very new, young organization. Our first aim is to create infrastructures for solidarity to people on the move. What does that mean? First of all, to practically, in Lampedusa, and in Palermo, do qualitative research and documentation, trying to denounce the deadly management of borders in Europe and specifically in Italy. Lampedusa is a very clear example of mismanagement. If in Palermo, we have a space, that is, let's say, a material space in which we try to make together different struggles with different communities and we try to let them overlap and cross each other, creating events together, and to dialogue with the shared topics and to make shared announcements.

At the same time, in Lampedusa, we try with our presence on the ground, to be critical and political gaze on what is going on there. Because actually, it's full of humanitarian organizations or European agency taking care of asylum

procedures or migrants reception, but what was missing was a bit of critical political presence and to be active on the ground. That means, how do you say, how to understand on the one hand what is needed to the people that crossed the island. And so, to try to see these needs and to respond to that, and to claim for the respect of rights on the one hand, but also for the tools that people need to cross in a dignified way, in a safe way, the path they want to cross.

In Lampedusa we organize cultural events, we try also to get involved a bit with the part of the population on the island, and to build together some shared perspective, critical perspective: on migration, on management of the borders, management of migration and so on. We also aim to have a presence at sea to document and testimony the continuum of border violence, that is at land, but it's also at sea. We refer to this concept of "freedom of movement", that is also part of our slogan, of course, taking the concept from the transport of struggles ongoing for I mean many years, but also practically thinking that we would like to build a world in which actually, there are no borders used as a tool of separation, exclusion or control of people.

All people, so not only people, all the people should move or stay as they want, as they can. There is no reason why I, with my privileged Italian passport that I have with no efforts, can go wherever and someone else just because they're born somewhere else, cannot. The point is not only about the refugees, statutes or conventions or visas themselves... Not about the technical, legal details. Ours is more a political struggle. That means that we want to fight for a world in which everyone has the freedom to stay, to live, to move.

Of course it's necessary to deal with reality in daily life. And so of course, there are borders, there are nation states, there is all the apparatus from the national state and we actually do deal with that every day. Every time we have to give tools to the people to facilitate the path, we actually do that, but because we have to do a lot of compromises in the practical, daily life, we want to at least propose and to think and try to challenge the reality, thinking — maybe a bit utopic, but still — kind of world in which there is not this kind of tool to exclude and control.

TFSR: That kind of cultural and imaginary work feels very important, as well as the dialogical element of engaging with the people and asking what their needs are and working to come to an understanding. And the people who live there also have needs, obviously, as well who have been living in Palermo and Lampedusa.

You mentioned that there are other organizations that are doing work in the same areas as you all are. A couple of others that come to my mind and that I've heard of are Sea Watch and Alarm Phone. I wonder if you could tell us, does Maldusa relate to those projects, maybe a little bit about what they are and what they do?

J: Yeah, sure. Maldusa is actually made of individuals that are coming from different organizations with at least a background of search and rescue — civil search and rescue — activities or experiences, or different networks of solidarity to people on the move. For example, there are people of Alarm Phone, as you said, of the Baye Fall community that is based in Palermo, but also from the Louise Michel organization and from Mediterranea Saving Humans, that is our Italian search and rescue organization. In Malduda there are not people who are directly involved in Sea Watch but we are part of the same family.

So, Alarm Phone is a hotline that was created in 2014 And they receive calls of distress, and they relay them to the authorities or to NGOs, to push the authorities to do what they have to do and it's a completely volunteer organization. These people are doing shifts there all day all night, and try to support and amplify the voices of those in danger at sea, who are in risk of not being assisted. So they don't directly work at sea but they are one of the most important support organizations to cooperate for search and rescue.

On the other hand, the other organization you mentioned, Sea Watch, is one of the biggest more important organization of search and rescue in the Civil Fleet, as we call the fleet of the civil actors active in the Central Mediterranean. They are mainly from Germany and they are one of the biggest organizations and they are at sea since 2015, if I'm not wrong. So also one of the older of the family [laughs].

But as I said so far Maldusa is very young. I can say that in this moment those who created Maldusa were coming mainly from: Mediterranea Saving Humans, Louise Michel, Alarm Phone and Baye Fall people. But of course, if tomorrow there is anyone from other organization who wants to participate with us in this political program, we are more than open and we want absolutely to be part of this collaboration process.

TFSR: Could you give a brief background on the immigration from over the last decades since the so-called Arab Spring and civil wars across North Africa and West Asia, and how these movements of people have shaped the European border regime?

J: For sure my answer will not be correct [laughs]. It will be just a little piece and I think it's a very complex question. But briefly, I will try. After 2011 and then after 2015, for sure, Europe had to deal in a different way with migration.

At least different from how it was before. "Fortress Europe" had been building her walls since the '90s, externalizing the frontiers and the violence to assure a kind of safety inside (in a way that I would define as a clearly a white western colonizer). But in the last years the situation has become very visible, more visible than before.

I think that it's also useful, when we think about Europe, to use also the metaphor, not only of the fortress, but also the one of the future. It's not actually closed to everyone. I mean, goods and rich people can always move everywhere. And actually also poor people, Black people from the south — it's not that they cannot enter. They cannot enter legally, but actually, exactly creating this way of, how to say...I mean what European governments are doing is exactly to create the condition to put people in danger to arrive in Europe and then to let them die in this danger as it is happening in this moment in the central Mediterranean or elsewhere. Or on the other hand, to put them in the position that once they arrive to be exploited, for example, with in the black market.

I would use these two levels to read the complexity of the situation. There are several conventions for refugees. I mean, Europe is always sold as the continent of human rights and reception and welcome countless. But most of the conventions we have are actually absolutely old fashioned, and are not able to deal with the reality we are facing in this moment. For example the convention of Genoa from 1951, that is absolutely important, and it's the one that is defining the status of refugees. That is fundamental to define who can enter and how and for which purpose, but actually it's very old. It refers to individuals, and it was thought up after the second World War. Today, you cannot think of, as an individual phenomenon, the one of migration. The refugee status was not created about migration as it is today.

On the other hand, another important convention is the Dublin Convention that says that people have to obtain documents, more or less, in the first country in Europe they arrive. That is crazy because, of course, geographically speaking there are so few countries in which people arrive. It doesn't make any sense to push them and to force them to stay there until they obtain the documents.

I would say that the point is that there have been a lot of changes since 2011, also the people who arrived have changed a lot. For example, there was a majority of quite young male coming 10 years ago, and today we have an absolutely high number of women with children. Often they are alone. Maybe they are the wife of the man that arrived 10 years ago. But I don't want to talk about numbers, that's not the point. I just want to say that people will change, routes will change and most probably also the reason to move will change. Still, in this

moment in Europe, we don't have a proper way to deal with this strange thing called migration. And so it has changed a lot but I would say that what I can see is that the management is even more securitarian and deadly.

TFSR: Can you talk a little bit about some of the people that are coming now and what's motivating them, some of the countries that you're seeing a lot of people come from, some of the motivations that they're spoken about, or some of the things that they're either moving towards or moving away from?

J: In this moment the roots are changing a lot. For example: in Italy, until a year ago, people were mainly coming from Libya, where they were forced, sometimes for a year, to stay in centers of detention. But in the last year something has changed and this route has moved a lot to Tunisia. So in this moment we have a lot, not only of Tunisian people — that was our old story — but also sub-Saharan people coming towards Europe from Tunisia.

That's quite interesting because sometimes they arrive in Tunisia with flights because Tunisia has some visa agreements with different countries. Some people can just arrive from sub-Saharan countries with a flight, or sometimes they come by foot from Algeria. Sometimes in very different ways, sometimes from Libya...different routes. I think that Tunisia is still one of the main countriues where people are coming from and Cote d'Ivoire, and Cameroon, Gambia, Senegal are, more or less, part of the main people in in the Tunisian route. But of course, there are still Bangladeshi, Syrian and Syriac from the east side. I'm not talking about the Balkan route, that is another topic, but in the central Med, these are the main nationalities.

Some of these countries are countries with war. We can talk about it or not, but what I want to say is that a lot of the countries where these people are coming from are exactly the countries that in Italy we consider "safe countries of origin". And it means that actually maybe there is no war, but maybe LGBTQ rights are not respected, for example. Or maybe it is very tough social or economic crisis but that's just not recognized. It's not only about war, it's also about social economical situations.

I would also like to stress the point that it's not about only desperation when people decide to leave: it's also about desires and imaginations and dreams. Exactly as I decided to go to France to do my master — and I can — it should be possible for all of that of them to just say, "Hey, I want to live [there]. Today I will go to the embassy and tomorrow, live [there]". The point is that they can't because the visa management and political policies are really making it impossible for most of the people from these countries to come. These illegal

routes are actually not necessarily coming from desperate situations, it's just that it's impossible to come here in a legal way even if you just want to study, even if you are coming from quite well-off family.

Of course there are several very tough and problematic situations, and we should also take our neocolonial, economic responsibility in most of the countries in Africa. We have to look at that and understand it and maybe learn something. At the same time, I think it's very important to see that sometimes it's absolutely not about war or desperation.

TFSR: For clarification, when we've talked on the show about the colonial or neocolonial relationship with countries that we see a majority of immigrants coming to the US from, they tend to be in Latin America. The United States has had a policy since the early 1800s of, to varying degrees, controlling markets, labor and political formations throughout this hemisphere to the exclusion of, for the most part, European powers. We talk about the relationship that the US has had — particularly in the 20th century — of destabilizing political formations, governments, nation states, or social movements that have had interests that run counter to parts of the ruling classes, depending on what time and what place in the United States.

I wonder if you could say a few things about that sort of relationship that Italy has with North Africa, or that people in Europe have with some of the countries and the sort of, what Walter Rodney talked about with the under development of former colonies and the wealth that's existent within the walls of Fortress Europe?

J: Yeah—

TFSR: — I just sprung it on you so if you don't want to answer that, that's okay.

J: No no, don't worry. We'll try, and then we'll see. I would say that actually it's even more related than you asked, somehow. If you think, for example, about the relation between France and Tunisia, or France and Algeria, of course, it's really not so old, actually. The same if you think about Senegal and France, or even if you think about Italy and Eritrea.

In Italy we have this big problem that [we believe] colonialism never existed somehow, and we don't recognize it, we don't know anything about it. I mean, it's true that most probably, we failed even in being colonizers, but still, it's quite interesting to see also the different relations that are going on in Africa because of our colonization. For example, one point that was very interesting for me — and I think can explain very well — is that for example, some Eritrean guys

told us that when they were in Libya trying to reach Europe, they were treated by Libyans particularly bad. This is because when Italy was in Eritrea they were using Eritrean soldiers to occupy Libya. That's why, somehow, this colonial past is coming again. That Eritrea is actually facing for a second time, this Italian past on them.

That's just an example that is also a bit symbolic, and maybe also a narrative one somehow. Still, it was very strong when someone tells you exactly this. I think we also always have to keep together one level that is about imaginaries, and one that is about practices. So I'm not sure that every person that decides to leave Senegal has a very clear understanding or political position against French colonizers. I'm not sure about that. But I would also say that I don't care so much, because I think that's not the point. I don't know if in the practices, in the everyday practices, they directly fight against this. The point is that in the wider geopolitical relationship we can still see that very well.

I'm an anthropologist, so usually I work with imaginaries, and with cultural parts of people. For me, the main point is also to understand why Europe is the place where people want to go. I mean, it's actually easy, no? We spent a lot of time to explain them that somehow our place was better than theirs. Of course, at some point, most probably people will want to join us. It's interesting to see how they sometimes shape the idea of Europe, or the idea of what they will find here, or how they deal with the storytelling about what they find in Europe to their families that stay there. And, of course, the narration of what they found sometimes is very far away from reality. So again, I think that the point is, how to say, a cultural colonialization, and that's what we have to fight firstly.

TFSR: Yeah, you've mentioned the management of immigration, and how-how it's being engaged and the material side of this from-from the European side of things. As you say, the-the routes that are taken across the water, or through the Balkans, or what have you, changed according to policy changes, and political shifts of the governments that have hegemony in those areas.

I wonder if you could talk a little bit about who's opposing the immigrant boats, what coast guards— I've heard about, recently, Greece re-depositing people back in the Mediterranean or people trying to force the Italian government to engage and try to save people. Or there's also Frontex as an agency, which a lot of people in my audience, mostly in North America, are maybe not familiar with that. But there's also right wing endeavors; there was, back in the 2017-2018 period, right wing civil society groups that were going out into the ocean and attempting to disrupt people's routes north.

I wonder if you could just talk about it like this. If you want to talk about the imaginary of what, besides the bureaucracy in the rules that they're facing, like, what they're so afraid of?

J: Yeah. So I would say that it's a bit different in different countries. The situation about the Coast Guard in Italy, for example, is quite different from the one in Greece. But yeah, let's try to say something general. Or no, I will go specifically and then I will go general later.

For sure, yes, in Greece there is a situation that is quite tough. We have some evidences from some days ago actually, of coast guards taking people from land, taking them on a boat and then leaving them at sea. That's crazy, it's unbelievable, but that's true.

Also Frontex, that is the European agency for border and coast control. There are evidences that has facilitated this kind of "pushback" or "pullback" that are absolutely illegal considering international law in Europe. That's the same that actually is happening with the so-called Libyan coast guard. I say "so-called" because the civil actors operating at sea in the central Med, we don't recognize the Libyan Coast Guard as a Coast Guard. Firstly, because they don't have a proper structure, they are not trained to really save lives, but more to enforce law. And what they do is not rescue, but just pullback. And that's exactly what Italy is financing, giving a lot of money and tools and ships and people and trainings.

The idea is, what I said before, to externalize this management, "out of sight, out of mind". Even if in Italy the Coast Guard is absolutely doing a great job and actually rescuing a lot of people, still the government is absolutely facilitating the pullback in Libya. Actually the same thing is going on that was with Tunisia. That is a new thing, because interceptions from the Tunisian Coast Guard is a kind of new thing. But of course, with increasing numbers of people coming from Tunisia, Italy is now having new agreements with Tunisia also to reinforce the tools of...sorry, it's not the Coast Guard of Tunisia, it's Garde Nationale which actually is police. So, again, it's not search and rescue, it's not saving life, it's law enforcement.

So I think that's also quite interesting, because what they do is they can't, I mean, their ships are not built to the rescue. And that's why also, most of the times they create shipwrecks and people die just because they are approaching them. I think that is one of the points that is directly related to the externalization, and then it becomes very practical and technical, but is absolutely related to what actually right [wing] movements and right parties actually feel even at land.

So, I cannot give an answer, of course, of why they fear. I mean, there are several theories, there are several understandings. I feel that I'm so deep and so new in this situation that I cannot really judge. We have to consider some kind of uncertainty and crisis that still, even if it's very different, but also in Italy, somehow it's going on. And this struggle among the poorest is something that is absolutely not new.

I really don't want to give banal answers, so I will not give an answer about this. But it's clear that it has also changed again, since 2017-2018. Because when, for example, in Italy, in 2017, the were the first measures criminalizing the humanitarian solidarity. There was also a big wave of solidarity coming back. Today, we still have another very right wing government, but the reaction from the civil society is quite different. I would say that, on the one hand, maybe is less polarized as a discussion because when, in 2018, the discussion was very, very polarized and maybe also simplified.

Nowadays, I would say that it's a bit more complicated. Our government is also acting in a very interesting way because on the one hand: they are completely dismantling and destroying the reception system, and they are claiming to work for the arrest of all the traffickers all over the world and to block all the ships and something like this. But then if you see the Coast Guard has made more rescue in the last six months since there is the new government, than in the last years. They are also going much further south, outside of the Italian search and rescue zone in the Maltese zone one to do the rescues.

I didn't say anything about Malta, that is another interesting case. We have a lot of cases where Malta is collaborating directly with Libya to organize pullbacks against any laws, any rights, anything. But again it's very complex and it's very...sometimes invisible, what is going on.

I think that what is interesting now is that, of course, for me, for "the people of the bubble", we say, that is a very big topic. But I would say that it's very different from 2018, when it was our public opinion topic. Nowadays a bit different, and even if there was, as you probably know, this big shipwreck in Crotone, in Italy, in Calabria. It was something very strong, very powerful because it was very close to the coast of Italy. I think it has somehow changed something now in the government measures. But still, we're not in the same situation of 2018 and so the reaction is different.

TFSR: So if you're seeing more rescues by the Italian Coast Guard, for instance, but the central government is dismantling the reception centers, where are people going? Are they just being immediately deported back to quote unquote, "Safe Third Party" countries?

J: That would be the idea. They declared this so they would like to increase the deportations. We are in the situation in which we are really interested in understanding how they want to do that, and also considering that they have, I guess, no funds to do that. But still, one month ago Italy declared the state of emergency about migration and it needs to have a lot of funds to manage the "emergency", so-called, that is absolutely not an emergency. It's a political choice, but still, they call it like this [an emergency].

We can see, for example, in Lampedusa, that with this state of emergency decrees, actually they change it. For example, the management of the hotspot that is there for the first reception of the people on the move, and actually they put Italian Red Cross as the manager. In two weeks they changed everything, okay? They destroyed and rebuilt the construction. They put a lot of new services and new things, saying that for them, the aim is to give out dignified reception to these people. Because one of the points in Lampedusa is that these hotspots get super overcrowded because the transfers to Sicily are very slow, and not every day, and etc. Now they are trying to do transfer everyday with flights, with ferries, with whatever.

On the one hand you can say that with the "state of emergency", it's giving some of the basic tools that actually we were forced to call for, because they were not there, not even them. They are giving these basic services and so we are happy, because people will find a more dignified situation once they arrive. But the point is that it's the management itself that is not working. You cannot put people in prison, because they are in prison.

It's tricky to go against something that starts to work in a way that is dignified. Let's see how it works and let's see also what happens to the people because it's news from yesterday that they maybe want to build a center for repatriation in Lampedusa itself. So you know, let's see what will happen. We are here exactly to, how to say, to observe and to be ready to denounce.

TFSR: [chuckles]

So you've talked about how it's a very particular situation, and very changing and shifting with the independent national governments of the countries that lined the European coast. Can you talk a little bit about how that border area looks along the ocean? I'm sure that there's a lot of arguments around national autonomy by the countries that are along the border that might conflict with a border organization that is not controlled by the populations, or by the national governments, directly, of those places. And can you talk a little bit about Frontex and how Frontex operates, and where it kind of fits in relation to these coast guards?

J: Yeah, so actually, I would say that this situation is somehow easier than whatfs we could expect. For what is our interest now, we have national waters, and we have international waters. We have search and rescue zones, and a search and rescue zone is a part of the water of the sea, in which a state has the duty to coordinate search and rescue operations.

The search and rescue zone overlaps with the international waters. For example, Italian search and rescue zones has a part of it that is in international waters and a part of it that is in the Italian national waters. Of course in the national waters it will be the state to take care of search and rescue. In the part of the international waters, that would be otherwise empty and with no control, every state can decide by themselves and declare which are the coordinates of the zone they want to take care of. It doesn't mean that they are the only one allowed to do the search rescue, or they are the only one who can coordinate. No, it's just that they are the one in charge of that once they are called to do that.

Usually the national Coast Guard is acting of course in the national waters and then in the search and rescue area of that nation. That means it's international waters. Of course, there is no search rescue zone of one state overlapping with the National waters of another state. That's clear. So in this scenario, at the moment, that situation is that every state can declare their own search and rescue area and they just need to have a center for the coordination of it at land.

In 2018, Libya, because of all the financing and the help of Italy, was in the position to declare their search and rescue zone that is absolutely huge and impossible for them to actually control and to actually be effective during rescue. That's quite similar also for Malta; they have a huge search and rescue zone and they never go out. The situation is that, at the end of the day, there is actually miles and miles in which nobody does search and rescue, but most important, actually nobody take the command about the coordination of the search and rescue.

Frontex actually is collaborating with the European countries, technically, to control the borders and to enforce the law of controlling the borders. What they told us is that they cannot enter in the Tunisian territorial waters but of course, once they are international waters, and in European search and rescue areas, they should collaborate with the authorities.

Say that they found a boat in distress. What happens is that they must do that [collaborate] but we don't know what civil society and the main problematic thing is that actually, not only they collaborate with, for example, the Libyan coast guard to facilitate the pullbacks but they don't communicate with search and rescue civil organizations. That means that in a lot of cases even if there are NGOs out at sea, able to the rescue, because Frontex was not communicating

about the case they were pulled back or they just sunk. So the point is exactly this, and it's between facilitating pullbacks and not communicating, and so facilitating shipwrecks.

TFSR: God, that's so dire [a long pause and a sigh].

So you had mentioned how the newer, explicitly right wing government in Italy has been changing the reception and the processing of migrants who are seeking refuge, or trying to transit through Italy at least. That's a concrete example of a shift in, maybe not spoken policy, but concrete policy. Do you see much of a big difference between leftist regimes and right wing regimes, or centrist regimes in Italy, for instance, where you're based in terms of policies towards immigration, is there like a big shift according to how this is engaged? Or do you see, at the national level, the bureaucracy just sort of entrenched and exists throughout different political electoral turns?

J: Quite interesting question because the answer is much complicated. I would say that I didn't see so much shift from right to left and then right again, parties or the government. I'm not sure it's just because of bureaucracy that is actually pervading everything. I would say that the problem is that, I mean, left wing parties in Italy are not really left wing parties. I remember that one of the first bases for criminalization of solidarity was in 2017 with our left wing government in Italy. So, I think that what happened later was this game of right, left, right, left, but actually, I mean, the process was just going on.

I think there is also another level, and I would say that the point is a more neoliberal securitarian way to manage migration and doesn't matter if it's right or left. I would also say that bureaucracy is actually something that is going everywhere and it's becoming much more difficult for the ones who would like to change something and to oppose some laws to do that. It's really becoming a technical thing. But that's the point. In my personal perspective of course it's very important to fight against technicalities and to go against them and to claim some change. Still, one of the main problems about management of migration is that it's becoming a really technical, juridical struggle.

In Italy, we can talk a lot about how radical power can be in juridical struggles. And we can talk about how laws can go against the state and whatever. Specifically about the sea is quite interesting because you can play with different levels of law; with international law, the national, and so on. I think it's important to focus on the fact that we have to have in mind a political struggle that is different than the technical one, and to keep them together is quite tricky.

I think that sometimes humanitarian organization and solidarity organizations lose a bit of this point, because it's a very complex moment to do that. On the one hand you are attacked as a humanitarian worker, so the... I don't know how to say, but the level [of discourse] is becoming lower and lower. The political chance to change something, to talk about real radical change and revolution is really, really taken apart. And I think it's exactly the game they want to play.

TFSR: I wonder if we couldn't jump back to the-to the work of Maldusa. Can you talk about some of the ways that you've engaged with some of the people in Lampedusa or in Palermo who aren't transiting through, around the issues of migration? How have you found those who've grown up on the islands, or in the area, to be engaging with this dynamic and with the people coming through?

J: Sorry, you mean the people of Maldusa? Or you mean the people in Lampedusa engaging with organizations?

TFSR: The people in Lampedusa. It sounded like before you were talking about working around the imaginary, working around the cultural and political side of migration, of freedom of movement. There's, you know. the people that are coming through, there's the government that's engaging, there's the NGOs and civil society groups, but there's also the people that live in the area also, and I'm wondering, are you finding that people that are living there are feeling conflicted? Are they feeling welcoming? I mean, I'm sure they're feeling lots of ways because they're people and they're complex, but...

J: Yeah. The first time I arrived in Lampedusa I was expecting an island, and a kind of population like a bubble. Also because they are like 5,000 people and 1,200 are different officials, 1,200 and only 5,000. So I thought okay, "3,500 people, they will all know each other and they will all be friends". Come on. Not true. In Lampedusa there are really several different perspectives, different points of view. Of course, it's obvious because we are all different human beings. But what was very interesting is that there is actually not one "island of Lampedusa position" about migration.

Lampedusa has been, as every newspaper says, "island of solidarity" for a long time. That's actually true. I mean, there were a lot of people that just for this human compassion, were just going out and saving people from the water. And then maybe hosting them at their place and giving them the possibility to

have a shower, to cut their hair and to just being with them. That was around, I would say until 2013.

Then after the big shipwreck of 2013, the 3rd of October, something has changed completely. Lampedusa became "the island of the shipwreck", but also the island of the European management of migration in Lampedusa. And it became the island of the boarder, the island of the frontiers, and it became a militarized area. It was already, but in that moment something has changed more and more. What most of the people in Lampedusa say is that somehow Europe, or the state — usually they say the State — took away from them the management of migration. That's exactly why, now, they don't feel engaged to that. And so the reaction today are, "I don't care", "They should die", or "It's not my problem". There is very few people who are still actually engaged in solidarity and taking care in the daily life of this.

The feeling that I have — and it's my perspective, okay, I cannot talk for them — but it's a kind of tiredness and exasperation because, one the one hand, they feel abandoned from the state, and on the other hand, to be over-controlled by the state. Because, for example, in Lampedusa, they don't have a hospital. And, of course, for people it's quite tough to not have a hospital. You could say "okay but actually, if you see other islands in Italy with the same numbers, same people, bla bla bla, there are other islands in Italy with no hospital". But Lampedusa is one of the most distant islands from Italy. It means that you if you have any kind of emergency, you have to take a flight of one hour, or 12 hours ferry. That's not easy. Since the '90s in Lampedusa babies cannot get born. I mean, women cannot deliver in Lampedusa.

The question is — this is a famous question, no? — "why can migrants have a hospital in the hotspot and we can't? Why can migrants be transferred for free and we have to pay?" A lot of questions in which actually was created that kind of competition. I mean, it's a very usual way, not to manage.

Another point is also that I felt a lot of kind of conspiracy theories. When you feel abandoned from the state you have to explain reality in a different way and you have to find answers to your questions. I think that is true sometimes when they say something like "racist people, southern Italian people", there is something about this. But actually it is more complex than this. The is also people who learn how to exploit it this and so they created a kind of business on that. And of course, I mean, the management is also a business for them on the island, if you think about food, supplies, or whatever. Of course, also people of the island earn money from this.

Also the tourism. A lot of tourists come to Lampedusa because they want to see Black people. They want to see the disembarkations. There are several

people taking pictures of them with swimsuits and with a partner on the beach — beautiful beaches in Lampedusa — close to the shipwreck boat. And that's creepy, no?! But, still, there are people who buy their flight Lampedusa because they want to see migrants, and they are disappointed when they cannot see them because actually they are all imprisoned in the hotspot.

I think there are several dynamics, several tensions, and I would say you can find everything in Lampedusa. You can find the most activist person and you can find the very racist person. I think that these are very deeply intertwined currents in Lampedusa, and it's a very clear symbol of how you should not manage a border.

TFSR: Well, that's the questions that I had for you. I wonder, was there anything that I didn't ask about that you think we should talk about right now? While-while we're on this-this call?

J: Actually I feel we talk a lot of things [laughs]. I mean, so far. I don't feel something that I need to say,

TFSR: Okay. I didn't know if there were glaring holes in the questions that I asked.

Thank you very much for having this conversation, taking the time and for the work that you do. I really appreciate it. There's the website and I'll link that, I think it's just www.maldusa.org/en. Are there any other ways that people can follow or make donations to support the work that you're doing?

J: Yeah, so there is a Facebook, Twitter and Instagram page and they are all Maldusa Project. And for donations we have, in the website, we have a page that is "Support us" and there are the details in case they want to do that.

TFSR: All right. Well, thank you so much, and take care of yourself.

J: Thank you so much.



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